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C O N F I D E N T I A L SECTION 01 OF 03 TEGUCIGALPA 001296

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STATE FOR WHA/CEN

E.O. 12958: DECL: 12/15/2019

TAGS: [PGOV](#) [PREL](#) [KDEM](#) [HO](#)

SUBJECT: AMBASSADOR'S CONVERSATION WITH DE FACTO REGIME FM  
LOPEZ CONTRERAS

REF: A. TEGUCIGALPA 1290

[1](#)B. TEGUCIGALPA 1289

Classified By: Ambassador Hugo Llorens, reasons 1.4 (b & d)

[1](#)1. (C/NF) The Ambassador met with de facto regime foreign Minister Carlos Lopez Contreras at the private residence of a mutual friend on December 14. While the purpose of the meeting was to discuss completing implementation of the Tegucigalpa-San Jose Accord, they also spoke at length about the aborted departure from Honduras of President Zelaya on December 9. The Ambassador explained that the United States had not been aware of the planned departure until Zelaya phoned him that evening to say good-bye, but that the United States supported the idea of Zelaya being given safe passage out of the country before Christmas for the good of all stakeholders. On the Accord, the Ambassador said the U.S. position was continued support for full implementation as the way out of the Honduran crisis, and the next step was implementation of a government of national unity that required the resignation of de facto regime leader Micheletti. Lopez gave his version of the events of December 9, blaming the failure of the departure plan on Zelaya, and said he would convey the USG position on Zelaya's departure and the Accord to Micheletti. End summary.

[1](#)2. (C/NF) The Ambassador and de facto regime foreign Minister Lopez mutually agreed to meet at the private residence of Tony Tavel, a prominent Honduran businessman and common friend, primarily to discuss completing the implementation of the Tegucigalpa-San Jose Accord, but also to discuss the aborted departure of President Zelaya and his family from Honduras on December 9. The Ambassador asserted the United States had nothing to do with the Mexican effort to provide Zelaya and his family an opportunity to depart Honduras for Mexico. He said the United States found out that same afternoon when Zelaya telephoned us. Zelaya told the Ambassador that he was leaving for Mexico City, where he would be received as an "honored guest." Zelaya said he would be traveling with his wife Xiomara, daughter Pichu and son Jose Manuel. The Ambassador said he wished Zelaya well. He noted to Lopez that once the effort collapsed, the Brazilians and Mexicans reached out to the Embassy for help.

The Ambassador said he had known beforehand that Dominican Republic President Fernandez had expressed interest in Zelaya going there. The Ambassador told Lopez the United States does support the idea of finding Zelaya safe passage out of Honduras, and said it would be good for all involved. He said allowing Zelaya to leave with his family before Christmas was a humanitarian issue for the Zelaya family. For the de facto regime, it would show a willingness to be magnanimous in the spirit of the holidays and would be well-received by the international community. Zelaya's departure would be good for the Honduran people because his continued presence in the Brazilian Embassy was a source of tension for the whole country. And the Brazilians would benefit because their relationship as a prominent actor in Latin America had been complicated by the continued siege of their embassy in Tegucigalpa due to Zelaya's continued presence.

13. (C/NF) Lopez said he too had been made aware of the plan late. Lopez said that, as he had understood it, the origin of the plan had been four or five days prior to December 9, when Zelaya telephoned a contact who was a friend in common with the Micheletti regime and pleaded with him to help arrange safe passage out of the country. (Note: Lopez did not give a name, but we know from separate sources that the common friend was Roberto Turcios. End note.) Lopez said Zelaya told Turcios that he was worried about his security and was eager to depart. According to Lopez, Zelaya specifically said he feared his own Venezuelan security detail who was with him in the embassy could kill him. Lopez said Zelaya asked Turcios for financial assistance, as well,

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noting he only had USD 500 in his wallet to live on if he left the country. Lopez said after the Zelaya call, Turcios had gathered fellow business people and collected approximately USD 100,000 for Zelaya. Lopez said that at that time, Zelaya expressed willingness to sign a letter supporting full implementation of the Tegucigalpa-San Jose Accord as well as accepting the December 2 congressional vote reaffirming its decision to remove him from office. Lopez said he himself learned of the plan when the Mexicans sent a diplomatic note for his clearance the morning of December 9, requesting safe passage for Zelaya, his family and Zelaya advisor Rasel Tome. Lopez said he proposed changes to the note, asking the Mexican Embassy to remove Tome from the note because of outstanding criminal charges against Tome and removing the Zelaya family members because they had no need for such guarantees since they were free to travel whenever they wished. Lopez said he also requested the note not refer to Zelaya as "President Zelaya." Lopez said he approved the redrafted diplomatic note later that day. Lopez said that at the appointed time of departure, all was set: security forces had entered the Brazilian embassy to escort Zelaya to the ground vehicle which was at the ready, and Zelaya's own presidential plane, the West Wind, was on standby at Toncontin Airport with pro-regime Honduran business figures ready to accompany him on the flight to ensure safe passage.

14. (C/NF) Lopez said the plan fell apart because Zelaya changed his mind at the last minute about the language of the letter. (Note: Zelaya has denied this to the Ambassador, saying the note was thrust upon him at the last minute by the regime. End note.) Lopez said Zelaya then went on the radio and criticized the regime for acting in bad faith, at which point the Micheletti team backed out of the agreement. Lopez noted that the de facto regime did not oppose a Zelaya departure now, but said it would have to be a more legally airtight plan. He noted the Attorney General and Supreme Court had criticized him for approving the original plan. Lopez said the only way the regime would allow Zelaya's free passage out of the country would be if a formal request came from the government of a country not contiguous with Honduras to grant Zelaya political asylum. He said there was no need to impose further conditions, however.

15. (C/NF) The Ambassador responded that he would pass on that information to Washington, and would advise the Zelaya side of the de facto regime's conditions. He told Lopez that Zelaya was not willing to accept asylum at the moment, but noted he could change his mind. The Ambassador added that if an opportunity to allow Zelaya's departure did arise, it would be welcomed by the international community.

16. (C/NF) The Ambassador noted that the United States remained fully committed to the implementation of the Tegucigalpa-San Jose Accord as the best path to restoring the democratic and constitutional order in Honduras and to achieving national reconciliation. The Ambassador noted that in the U.S. view, Micheletti had already achieved his objectives with the November 29 elections and December 2 vote by congress. He added that there was no longer any threat that Zelaya would resume power -- especially if he were to depart the country. The Ambassador said the Honduran people had given a clear mandate to president-elect Lobo and the National Party in all levels of the elections. He said the next logical step was full implementation of the Accord through the creation of a national unity government and for Micheletti to step down. The Ambassador made clear that the United States did not hold any personal enmity toward Micheletti, his close associates or his family, and that if Micheletti were to step down, the United States could recognize his 35 years of public service. He added that Micheletti had an opportunity to take U.S. interests into account by stepping down. However, if Micheletti continued to defy the United States and the rest of the international community, his defiance would be viewed unfavorably by the

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United States and a price would have to be paid. The Ambassador added that by stepping down, Micheletti would also be doing a great service to the Honduran people and the Lobo administration, because it would enable Honduras to re-engage with the world and gain the support needed to climb out of its looming financial crisis.

17. (C/NF) Lopez said that although he disagreed with the U.S. position, he understood it and acknowledged that it had been consistent all along in its support for the Accord and the principles behind it. He said he knew Lobo would inherit an economic, political and foreign policy mess. He specifically highlighted the Lobo team's transition challenges in having to work with the de facto foreign ministry while also having to pursue a second foreign policy track because the regime did not control the overseas Honduran diplomatic missions. He said in Spain for example, the (Zelaya Foreign Minister) Patricia Rodas diplomatic team had control of the embassy building, but had been unable to pay the rent. He also noted that addressing the economic problems of the country required a diplomatic opening with the world. Lopez said he would convey the U.S. message to the Micheletti regime regarding the issue of a potential Zelaya departure and Accord implementation.  
LLORENS